

Governance Committee

6 July 2020 – At a virtual meeting of the Governance Committee held at 10.30 am.

Present: Cllr Duncton (Chairman)

Cllr Patel, Cllr Bradbury, Cllr M Jones, Cllr A Jupp, Cllr Lanzer, Cllr Marshall, Cllr Mitchell and Cllr Walsh

Apologies were received from

Absent:

Also in attendance:

Part I

17. Declarations of Interest

17.1 In accordance with the Code of Conduct Cllr Bradbury declared a personal interest as the Chairman of the Standards Committee at Mid Sussex District Council in relation to the item on the Good Governance Review.

18. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

18.1 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2020 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

19. Joint leadership arrangement with East Sussex County Council

19.1 Members were reminded that the Council, in December 2019, had entered into an arrangement with East Sussex County Council for the joint appointment of a chief executive and for the provision of mutual support to address a range of corporate challenges. The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance which reviewed the arrangement by reference to its original aims and in light of experience (copy appended to the signed minutes).

19.2 The Leader commented that in his view the experience had been very positive and significant work had been done around improvements to corporate governance. Becky Shaw, the joint Chief Executive, had also provided leadership confidence which had enabled the Council to make some significant appointments, including the new Executive Director Children's Services, as well as filling other posts on an interim basis. Significant progress had been made in relation to both the Children's Services Improvement Plan and the Fire & Rescue Service improvement programme. Overlaying everything had been considerable work resulting from the response to Covid-19 and the need to redirect services. This had demonstrated the Council was building a strong leadership team and partner relationships had also been improved. The Leader felt that

significant steps had been taken against the aims and objectives set out at paragraph 2.2 of the report.

19.3 Some members commented that they would have liked more detail in the report and more evidence that the original aims had been met. The Director of Law and Assurance proposed that further detail be brought to the Committee as part of a future report on the Good Governance Review prior to Council in October.

19.4 Some concern was expressed about the need to ensure that time pressures were monitored, both for the sake of the two councils and also for the Chief Executive. The Leader said that, working with the Chief Executive herself and the Leader of East Sussex County Council, care was taken to ensure the single role of steering two councils was manageable.

19.5 Resolved –

- (1) That the Committee notes the report and confirms the continuation of the arrangement with East Sussex County Council; and
- (2) That additional sources of assurance and evidence of benefits be brought to the Committee as part of a future report on the Good Governance Review.

20. Good Governance Review

20.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance on the implications, for those areas for which the Committee was responsible, of the programme of work on aspects of Council governance and to endorse the revised whistleblowing policy as part of the good governance work related to organisational culture (copy appended to the signed minutes).

20.2 The Leader expressed support for the changes which had already been made to governance arrangements as set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report. He said he hoped that all members would attend the virtual Member Day on 8 July when the results of the work so far would be presented for comments. Relevant output from the session would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

20.3 The Director of Law and Assurance confirmed that the Member Day on 8 July would provide members with information about the workstreams arising from the Good Governance Review, a number of which would affect responsibilities of the Committee. Work would be undertaken over the next couple of months and a further report would be brought to the Committee in the autumn.

20.1 Cllr Jones commented on the proposed changes to the Whistleblowing Policy which he felt should be submitted for to the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee for examination before it was approved by the Governance Committee. He therefore moved an amendment as set out below which was seconded by Cllr Walsh:

'That the Committee refers the revised Whistleblowing Policy (paragraph 2.5 and Appendix 2) to the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee and receives any comments, before returning to the Governance Committee for approval.'

20.5 Other members commented that the policy was sensible and timely. The Director of Law and Assurance commented that, as the policy was not a matter for the Executive, it would not be appropriate for it to be referred to a Scrutiny Committee. As a non-Executive matter oversight of the policy fell within the responsibility of the Standards Committee. However, as there was not a meeting of that Committee until November, the matter had instead been brought to the Governance Committee for consideration. He said there would be a report to the next meeting of the Standards Committee for information.

20.6 Cllr Jones' amendment was put to the vote and lost.

20.7 Resolved –

- (1) That the Committee notes the report and the plans for a further report on the output from the workstreams identified and considers the principles for guiding the work on streamlining and simplifying decision making (set out at Appendix 1 to the report); and
- (2) That the revised Whistleblowing Policy (paragraph 2.5 and Appendix 2 to the report) be approved.

21. Plans for Member Meetings during the Covid-19 Emergency

21.1 As requested at its last meeting, the Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance on proposals for an additional meeting of full Council in September 2020 (copy appended to the signed minutes).

21.2 Members supported the proposed date of 18 September and welcomed the fact that the meeting would follow the usual rules and timing.

21.3 Some support was also expressed for hybrid meetings once the rules and technology allowed. In response to calls for alternative video technology to be used for virtual meetings, Cllr Lanzer commented that other platforms were being considered but it was important for calls to be robust which had proved to be the case with Skype.

21.4 Resolved –

- (1) That the plans for an additional County Council meeting to be held on 18 September 2020 (paragraphs 2.1 to 2.3 of the report) be approved;
- (2) That the organisation's capacity and resources to support member meetings should continue to be monitored in liaison with members (paragraph 2.4 of the report); and

- (3) That Democratic Services undertake consultation on arrangements for future member meetings in advance of its next meeting (paragraph 2.5 of the report).

22. Date of Next Meeting

22.1 The Committee noted that the next meeting will be held at 2.15 p.m. on Monday, 7 September 2020.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am

Chairman